ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254693957

Confronting Colonialism and Racism: Fanon and Gandhi

Article · January 2007

CITATIONS
2

READS
678

1 author:



Hira Singh
York University
17 PUBLICATIONS **59** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Ambedkar-Gandhi Debate on Caste View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Hira Singh on 20 May 2015.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge

Volume 5
Issue 3 *Reflections on Fanon*

Article 31

6-21-2007

Confronting Colonialism and Racism: Fanon and Gandhi

Hira Singh
York University, hsingh@yorku.ca

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture

Part of the African Studies Commons, Asian Studies Commons, and the Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Singh, Hira (2007) "Confronting Colonialism and Racism: Fanon and Gandhi," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 5: Iss. 3, Article 31.
Available at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol5/iss3/31

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact library.uasc@umb.edu.

HUMAN ARCHITECTURE: JOURNAL OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE
A Publication of OKCIR: The Omar Khayyam Center for Integrative Research in Utopia, Mysticism, and Science (Utopystics)
ISSN: 1540-5699. © Copyright by Ahead Publishing House (imprint: Okcir Press). All Rights Reserved.

Confronting Colonialism and Racism
Fanon and Gandhi

Hira Singh

York University, Canada

hsingh@yorku.ca

Abstract: Fanon and Gandhi were products of colonial social formations, confronting the violence of racism embedded in colonial domination and control by seeking emancipation through political action. This article explores the trajectory of Gandhi's political engagement to empower the Asian laboring and trading classes, racially discriminated and politically marginalized by the imperial-colonial set up in South Africa from the 1890s to the 1910s. The article compares the commonalities and differences in the experiences of colonialism and racism by Gandhi and Fanon in their respective historical contexts as reflected in their political tactics and strategies informed by their respective understandings and cultural interpretations of the modernity of the west—the colonizer—in relation to the east (albeit, non-western world)—the colonized. The article highlights the significance of a comparative account of colonized people's resistance to the racialized discourse and intercourse of colonialism-imperialism and its particular urgency in the current context of globalization shrouded in the mission of democratization.

OUR TIMES

Today, we are living in a system that is based on counting, and accounting for, every single pin in a factory. The same system, however, boasts of killing human beings who it, as a rule, doesn't count.[1] It counts the pins, because each pin, as a commodity, has market value. It is integral part of a system of production for value, whereas, the people it kills in wars precisely in order to perpetuate and expand the same market-based system of social production, have no value, albeit market value. So they don't count. Who are these people, even less valuable than a pin? These are the colonial other—de-humanized and de-valued? They are being otherized in the process of

[1] The reference is to the claim by the Pentagon made during the Gulf War in 1991 and the ongoing war in Afghanistan and Iraq that it does not count the number of Iraqis or Afghans killed.

Hira Singh is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at York University, Toronto, Canada. He has a Ph.D. from the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, and another Ph.D. from the University of Toronto. Author of *Colonial Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Princes, Peasants, and Paramount Power* (Sage, 1998), he has published articles in refereed journals in the areas of social theory, agrarian relations, social movements, feudalism in non-European and European societies, and transnational labor migration. He is currently working on a book, *Empire and Indenture: The Discourses of Free Labor and the Intercourses of Unfree Labor Regimes*.

being colonized. And colonialism today, like the colonialism of the past (not a very distant past—remember Fanon was writing in the 1950s), is integral part of the system of commodity production. It has wrapped itself in the lofty ideal of spreading freedom, democracy, and civil society. The old form of colonialism was wrapped in the ideal of the civilizing mission, and the civilizing mission was barbaric to the core. The new one, notwithstanding its new wrapping, is no different. As William Faulkner said, past is not past: past is present with us. The colonial past is unfolding itself in the present. And that is what makes Fanon and Gandhi so relevant today.

FANON AND GANDHI: DIFFERENT HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Fanon was writing in the 1950s, when "Revolution [was] mankind's way of life." It was the "age of revolution." Capitalism was under siege, surrounded by a global tide of revolution. In the revolutionary struggle, the immense oppressed masses of the colonies and semi-colonies felt that they were a part of life for the first time (Gilly 1965: 1). When Gandhi came to the political scene in the1890s, grappling with the Indian Question in South Africa, revolution was not humankind's way of life. Rather, it was the age of imperialism and colonialism: the Empire was at its zenith. The sun never set on the Empire was the imperial boast. The victims of the Empire turned it around and mocked the Empire by saying that the sun was too scared of the English to set on the Empire. It was an age in which, as Fanon later rightly recognized, the oppressive systems of colonialism and imperialism looked apparently 'omnipotent' (Gilly 1965:1). The only revolutions known until then—the English Revolution and the French Revolution—were indeed the cause, and not a solution to the problem, i.e., colonialism and imperialism that Gandhi was confronted with. Yes, there was another (real) revolution—the Haitian Revolution. Unfortunately, in the historical accounts of revolutions, it is among the least talked about. Not only in the history of revolutions, but even in the accounts of the abolitionist movements, Haitian Revolution is not duly recognized.[2] Returning to Gandhi and Fanon, what is rather surprising is that, notwithstanding the difference in their historical contexts, they had so much in common.

There are a number of issues of common interest between Fanon and Gandhi in their confrontation with colonialism and racism. It is not possible to deal with all. For the present moment I will briefly deal mainly with two issues that were important to Fanon and Gandhi and their specific colonial contexts. These are colonialism, race/color, and culture and colonialism and the national liberation struggle.

Color, Culture, and Racial Equality

Fanon understood the colonial world as permeated with race. "[In] the colonial context," he wrote, "it is evident that what parcels out the world…is …the fact of belonging to …a race …[In] the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. The governing race first and foremost are those who come from elsewhere, those who are like the original inhabitants "the others" (*WE*: 40). Sartre echoed Fanon: …with us there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and

[2] It is interesting to note that in the film, *Amazing Grace*, commemorating the 200th year of the abolition of slave trade by the British Parliament in 1807, there is no reference at all to the Haitian Revolution. What 'an amazing disgrace'.

monsters…[I]n the notion of the human race we found an abstract assumption of universality which [only] served as cover for the most realistic practices…On the other side of the ocean there was a race of less-than-humans, who, thanks to us, might reach our status a thousand years hence (Sartre 1963: 26).

Gandhi came face to face with the race / color question soon after his arrival in South Africa in 1893. Everyone and everything in South Africa—dead or living—had a color code, and Gandhi did not wait long to plunge into it. He questioned the color hierarchy condoned by colonial regime in South Africa staking a claim to equality between Europeans and Indians, not in terms of biological properties, but those of culture and civilization—"Indian's fitness for equality with the civilized races." In a Petition to Lord Ripon, Secretary of State for Colonies, dated Durban, July 17, 1894, he wrote that Indian boys going to school in South Africa learn to adopt the European style. They, later in life, come in contact chiefly with the European community, and become, in every respect, as fit for the exercise of their economic and political rights, including the right to franchise as any European. He noted that if one goes by the results in India or in England, of the competition between English and Indian students, there was ample proof that Indians could successfully compete with the Europeans. "[We] purposely refrain from quoting extracts from the evidence given before the Parliamentary committees on the [question of Indians' ability to compete], because "that would almost look like carrying coals to Newcastle." Hence, exclusion of Indians from franchise or other rights, he said, was an insult to the whole Indian nation (*CW I:* 122-124).

In a letter to the Editor, *The Times of Natal*, dated October 25, 1894, he wrote: "You, in your wisdom, would not allow the Indian or the native the precious privilege (of franchise) under any circumstances, because they have a dark skin. You would look to the exterior only. So long as the skin is white it would not matter to you whether it conceals within it poison or nectar." He argued that color distinction was against the norms of civilization and Christianity. "Suffer little children to come unto me" said the Master. His disciples in the colony would improve upon the saying by inserting "white" after "little," he quipped. Referring to a *fete*, organized by the then Mayor of Durban, he complained that there was not a single child of color invited there, and he asked if this was a "punishment for the sin of being born of colored parents" (*CW I:* 135-37).

He interpreted every occasion of color discrimination as the contradictions between the principles of Christianity and the western tradition on the one hand, and the colonial practice on the other: "I read in your leaders' expressions of very lofty and humanitarian sentiments. Unfortunately for the Indian, these sentiments are set aside" (CW *I:* 281).

In an "Open Letter" to the Legislative Council of Natal, dated December 1894, he drew attention to the color line: "…there can be no doubt that the Indian is a despised being in the colony…If that hatred is simply based upon his color, then, of course, he has no hope…No matter what he does, he will never have the white skin (*CW I*: 136-37). He pointed out that in the colony of South Africa "British subjects" is used only for "white persons," he wrote that it was an affront to the dignity of the British Indians in the Republic, who are denied any political rights and are treated practically as chattels, because they are not white (*CW I*: 254-55). In a Memorial to Natal Assembly, dated April 27,1896, concerning the Franchise Amendment Bill, he wrote that the Bill was objectionable, because "it introduces the color distinction in a most invidious manner," because it allowed white natives from Europe to become voters in South Africa, but not the Indians, who as

British subjects" are equal to British subjects of any color, creed, or nation. His objection was not only to color discrimination, but also to that it was a violation of the Imperial Proclamation of 1858 under which the Indian British subjects were granted equality of status with the British European subjects. A breach of the Proclamation to discriminate against the Indians, he warned, would mean "perpetual agitation" (*CW I*: 336-38).

Gandhi was not a political theorist, rather, a political practitioner. The agitation he built was based upon the gap he perceived in the provision of the British culture and constitution on the one hand, and their application to the Indians in the colony on the other. Thus, in an article in *The Natal Mercury,* Durban, March 2, 1896, objecting to the discrimination against the descendants of the Indian indentured laborers domiciled in South Africa, he wrote that what mattered in the British tradition was not man's "birth," but his "worth." "But for this," he noted "a butcher's son would not have been honored as the greatest poet" (*CW I*: 295). As the time passed, the agitation against discrimination based on race gained momentum and his pronouncements acquired progressively more forceful expression. In a "Speech at Johannesburg Mass Meeting," dated December 5, 1905, he spoke:

> This is an instance of the spirit of dignity that informs this struggle. …How can we forget that…gave his life for the cause…the Indian community…will never give up the fight. Whatever may happen…I and many other Indians have dedicated our lives to the cause…it is not a favor that we want, but recognition of] a right…we have an inferior status…on the ground that we are Indians. So long as this stigma is not removed, our pledge will remain unfulfilled. We demand that the law must grant equal rights…to Europeans and Indians…[to] ensure legal equality and uphold our honor… It would be a great victory for us to get this. And get it we shall (*CW 10:* 93).

He fought for human dignity, normal human treatment for every Indian in South Africa: "Leave them to follow their legitimate pursuits, do not attempt to degrade them, treat them with ordinary kindness," and there would be no agitation, he wrote. "What the Indians do and would protest against," he emphasized, "is color distinction—disqualifications based on account of racial difference." He demanded respect for the Indians based upon a recognition of the contribution of their labor—the labor of the Indian indentured workers—to the economic well being of the Republic. Citing the enormous economic gains made by the colony, as a result of the employment of the Indian indentured labor, he said that these records ought to tell their own tale and "silence childish race sentimentalities…" ("The Indian Franchise: An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa," dated December 16, 1895, *CW I*: pp. 259, 271, 273).

Gandhi rejected the inequality between white European and Indian based on race and demanded equality based on constitutional principles and the norms of a civilized conduct. All British subjects, irrespective of color, religion, or nationality, are equal. Indians, he demanded, should be treated "on a footing of equality," and the British hold on India depends on those terms, and no other, he declared (*CW I*: 273).

Equality between the Indian and the European, as the British subjects, as a precondition for the continuation of the British colonial rule that Gandhi developed in the very early days of his arrival and involvement with the Indian question in South Africa proved a potent weapon for the

nationalist movement in India, with wider ramifications for the Indians, especially the Indian indentured labor, in South Africa and in other parts of the British Empire. Scholars, who tend to identify Gandhi with 'elite' politics have completely missed the intrinsic connection between the elite and non-elite segments of the Indian population in the racialized context of South Africa (and other colonies whose economic survival was dependent upon the Indian indentured labor). Given their preoccupation as elite, these scholars have missed the connection between the struggle over the Indian question in South Africa and its wider context—the global dimension of the movements—connecting India, the colonies, and the metropolitan centre, England (for treatment of Gandhi's politics in South Africa as elite, see in particular, Swan 1985).

Both Fanon and Gandhi understood race as a cultural construction. Fanon developed a sophisticated theory of discrimination based on cultural racism he experienced in France and in the French colonies. Gandhi used the racial discrimination he encountered in South Africa to build a mass movement.

Critique of Western Colonial-Capitalist Culture

Fanon was critical of colonial capitalist culture. Having realized the impossibility of assimilation in the sense of equality of status between black and white, Fanon rejected the idea of assimilation when he realized that assimilation / integration essentially means two things: first, that by it the white man means "be like me"; second, that the white man is convinced that the black man can never be as good as he is. Before Fanon, James Baldwin had come to a similar conclusion: There's no reason for you to try to become like white people and there's no basis whatsoever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you* (Caute 1965: 11). Having realized the contradictory character of assimilation, Fanon questioned the superiority of white culture claimed by the colonialist. Gandhi, very much like Fanon, realized the impossibility of assimilation into English culture, took a step backwards to look at the entire notion of modern western colonial-capitalist culture critically. His critique of the western culture was a rejection of materialism per se. Addressing the "Inadequacy of Materialism," he wrote: …its greatest achievements are the invention of the most terrible weapons of destruction, the awful growth of anarchism, the frightful disputes between capital and labor and the wanton and diabolical cruelty inflicted on innocent…animals in the name of science, "falsely so called" (*Natal Times*, dated January 21, 1895, *CW I*: 165-66)

More pointed critique of the western culture is found in Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, a document he wrote in 1910 on his journey back from four months' trip to England as part of the Transvaal Indians delegation to persuade the English government to intervene on behalf of the Indians in Transvaal. The condition of England at present, he wrote, is pitiable. English Parliament considered to be the mother of (all) Parliaments, he wrote is like a "sterile woman and a prostitute." That Parliament has not yet, of its own accord, done a single good thing. If India follows England, it is my firm conviction that she shall be ruined (*CW 10*: 16-18)

Why so?

England, he said, was in this condition due to modern civilization. It is a civilization only in name. Under it the nations of Europe are being ruined…He called it "a disease that is 'eating into the vitals of the English nation." England today, he wrote, is a place where for sake of a pittance, half a million women are laboring under trying circumstances in factories. The problem with England is that it wants to convert the

whole world into a vast market for its goods. England is a creation of modern civilization, which, he said, is s "such a disease…we have to be very wary" (*CW 10*: 18, 21, 23, 26). His condemnation of English civilization is at times punctuated with humor. Talking of English greed and territorial ambitions, as part of English civilization, he cites a quip, allegedly attributed to Kruger (President of South Africa): asked if there was gold on the moon, Kruger is said to have replied, "it is highly unlikely, because if there were, the English would have annexed it" (*CW 10*: 23).

Manichean Character of the Colonial World

Fanon understood the colonial world as a Manichean world. In addition to the physical coercion by the police, paramilitary, and the military, the colonialist represents the native as "quintessence" of evil'. The native is not only lacking in values; he is insensible to ethics; he is the negation of values; he is absolute evil. Dehumanizing the culture of the colonized is essential to the process of colonization. The customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths signify the spiritual poverty and depravity. Hence, the need to cleanse the indigenous tradition by a dose of Christian values, very much like the use of DDT for the eradication of malaria mosquitoes (*WE:* 41-42). Colonial cleansing is the transformation of the native into an animal (*AR*: 107). Césaire had described this situation as "*chosification*" (turning men into things). Fanon argued that to enslave men it was necessary to divest them of their humanity by systematic mystification (Caute 1970: 11). The native, on the other hand, he noted, knows all this, and laughs to himself…he knows that he is not an animal; and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons to secure victory (*WE*: 43).

In a similar vein, Gandhi wrote: The English have taught us that we were not one nation before their arrival and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This, he said, is without foundation…It was because we were one nation, he observed, that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us. Talking of colonial knowledge production as an instrument of cultural hegemony he wrote: They have a habit of writing history; they pretend to study the manners and customs of all peoples…They usurp the function of Godhead…and write about their own researches in most laudatory terms and hypnotize us into believing them…and we in our simplicity believe all that they say (*CW 10:* 27, 31).

His idea of the nation was multicultural, multiethnic, an assimilation of diversity, which is open to the introduction of the foreign and the foreigner. To qualify as a nation, a country must allow for assimilation. His idea of assimilation is not to be confused with the "melting pot" in which nothing ever melts. He thought that pre-British India, where the Hindus lived under Muslim sovereigns and Muslims under the Hindu, was an example of assimilation. With the arrival of the British, however, things changed as communal divide grew and intensified (*CW 10*: 29).

Fanon talked about the 'identity of interests' between the colonialist and the national bourgeoisie. The question of the global identity of bourgeoisie, or of comprador bourgeoisie in colonial or former colonial countries is too large and complex to be discussed here. As far as Gandhi is concerned, he made it clear that the interests (political or economic) of England are not identical to those of India's. India, it should be noted, was more than a mere colony: it was a launching pad for the expansion and consolidation of the Empire. India was the Raj. In the imperial wars England fought with China, Russia, the Middle East, and South Africa, India played a critical role.

England dragged India into these wars on the assumption that the interests and conflicts of England were identical to those of India's. Gandhi said no to that. Referring to the imperial political interests of England, he wrote: "You may fear Russia; we do not..." The lack of identity of the economic interests between India and Great Britain was even more pronounced in his writings (and policies, programs, and actions) right from the very days of his political commitments. About the economic interests (England's exploitation of India), he wrote: "You must abandon the idea of deriving any commercial benefit from us…You may keep the riches that you have drained away from this land, but you may not drain riches henceforth…You may not keep one eye on Manchester and the other on India."

The idea of economic-political freedom in his view was tied down to cultural liberation. As Fanon wrote, mummification, stultification, and destruction of indigenous culture is one of the prime objectives and outcomes of colonization—destroying the norms of native culture, its values and practices, its language. Restoration and renewal of culture as a fundamental prerequisite of anti-colonial struggle is what Fanon and Gandhi share in common. Gandhi wrote: "We consider your [English] schools and law courts to be useless. We want our ancient schools and courts to be restored. The common language of India is not English but Hindi. You should therefore learn it. We can hold communication with you only in our language." What Gandhi was propounding as early as in 1910 was indeed, revolutionary. He was proposing a reversal of ruler-ruled relationship between the colonizer and the colonized—turning things upside down. You can remain in my country, he wrote, "…but although you are the rulers, you will have to remain as servants of the people. It is not we who have to do as you wish, but it is you who have to do as we wish (61).

Gandhi, above all, was a politician, a political realist. In South Africa in 1910, he was aware that India's freedom from the British rule would be a long drawn battle. Not only England was not prepared to let India go (England was never prepared to let India go: Indians forced the British to go), Indians at that point of time were not prepared to let themselves go off England. They prepared themselves for freedom from the colonial bondage through the movements that took another four decades, when Gandhi finally asked England: "Quit India." In asking England to "quit," Gandhi was only articulating the wish of the people of India. How did that popular wish develop? For that we have to turn to the liberation struggle, anticolonial movements, in India.

That brings me to the most important question of comparison and contrast between Fanon and Gandhi—peasantry, the national bourgeoisie, the political parties, and the national liberation struggle.

FANON, GANDHI, AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE: NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE, PEASANTRY, AND THE POLITICAL PARTY

Fanon's position on the above is well known. I will briefly recapitulate the points that are relevant to the argument I want to make. Fanon noted that a critical question in anti-colonial movements is to decide on the conduct and organization of the movement, i.e., determining the means and the tactics, which, according to him, were dependent on the forces existing in colonial societies concerned. At this point, generalization ends, and concrete analysis of the concrete forces of particular colonial countries kicks in.

Before proceeding further, I may add that the forces existing in colonial societies that Fanon spoke of should include both—the forces of change as well as the forces in-

terested in the status quo. A movement is not a one-sided process. When everything is at stake, the dominant interests do not sit idle and wait: they actively intervene. Hence the starting point in the study of movements is a reconstruction of the contradictory forces confronting each other, although in practice, most studies tend to focus on the forces of change only. One of the forces Fanon refers to, in the first place, are the political parties (beside the intellectual or commercial elites—more about them later). The political parties in the colony, Fanon says, proclaim abstract principles but refrain from issuing definite commands (*WE*: 59). In the arduous trajectory of Gandhi's political journey from South Africa to India, the picture that emerges is that his political demands were anything but abstract statements of principled generalities; rather, his political demands were specific—specific to the concrete context of the movement in question. More importantly, we must bear in mind that Gandhi was not a political theorist; he was, above all, a political practitioner. Before the end of the first year of his arrival in South Africa, he realized that the solution to the 'Indian Problem' was not going to come from the colonial set up in South Africa, nor, for that matter, from the mother parliament (and the mother of all parliaments) in England. So he turned to the Indian people in South Africa, whose demands he was articulating. Having learned his most important political lesson in the very first year of his political apprenticeship, Gandhi practiced it until the very end of his life. Given that, Fanon's observations, "When the nationalist leaders *say* something, they do not really *think* it" (emphasis in the original) do not apply to Gandhi.

At this point, it is important, following Fanon and my own additions above, to come to grips with the main social forces in India during the anticolonial movements. India during the British colonial rule remained, as it was in precolonial days, a predominantly agrarian society. And the precolonial agrarian relations of production, power structures, and ideologies in India were feudal. The British colonial rule in India, contrary to the predictions made by Marx and the claims made by the Marxists later on, did not dissolve the precapitalist, albeit feudal, economic, political structures and ideologies: it could not. Instead, it was forced, as a result of the resistance by the then dominant class in the countryside, to make a compromise embodied in the historic alliance between colonial capitalism and Indian feudalism. I have dealt with this question elsewhere (Singh 1998). It was this alliance of colonial capitalist and Indian pre-capitalist forces—a janus—that the national parties, the bourgeoisie, and the peasantry in India had to confront in the process of the liberation struggle.

Before going further, I should note that a major problem with the historiography of the Indian national liberation struggle is that it is, by and large, preoccupied with the role of the political parties, particularly, the Indian National Congress, with Gandhi at the helms. Some admire Gandhi (and the Congress), others denounce one, or the other, or both. In the process, the people of India, the real force behind the struggle, are lost. It may not be out of context to note my disappointment in this regard with the now famous Subaltern Studies. Populist in spirit, elitist in its ideology, revisionist in its historiography, Subaltern Studies has written peasantry out of the history of anticolonial struggles in India. Those who are never tired of talking of the autonomy of the subaltern, are easily swayed when it comes to the role of peasantry in anticolonial struggle in its decisive moment, i.e., the 1920s-1940s. The peasants during this period are subsumed within Subaltern Studies' omnivorous category of 'elite', or at best manipulated by the latter for its own end (see Singh 2003). This limitation of Subaltern Studies is not accidental. It is central to their

basic approach, which, notwithstanding their claim to distinction, is not distinct from the elite historiography of the nationalist and the liberal schools. One of the problems that nationalist, liberal, and subaltern historiographers alike have in common is their tendency to ignore class analysis, especially the class analysis of the countryside. As a result, there is as yet little understanding of the role of peasantry, particularly the peasant movements, in the Indian liberation movement (and unification of India as a nation—a problem I cannot deal with here).

Gandhi, Peasantry, and the Liberation Movement in India

As outlined above, the ruling block during the colonial rule in India consisted of the colonialists and the Indian landed class. The majority of the Indian population was rural living off the land. It is important to note here that the precolonial agrarian structure in India was diverse, and the colonial interventions were conditioned by this diversity. That's why during the colonial rule there was permanent settlement in Bengal, *ryotwari* in Madras and Bombay, *Zemindari / Pattedari* in Agra, *taluqdari* in Oudh, *mahalwari* in the Punjab, to mention the broad categories in British India, which did not include two fifth of India, then known as the 'Other India', or 'Indian India'—the territory of the Indian princely states, consisting of a quarter of the entire population of the country. The agrarian structure and power relations of the princely states were outside the jurisdiction of the colonial state. The peasant movements of the 1920s-1940s, that played a decisive role in the decline of the precapitalist production and power relations and the dissolution of the colonial rule, were conditioned by these regional and systemic variations in agrarian relations in a significant way. What is, however, important to note here is that cutting across these variations, the agrarian structure in India during the colonial rule was highly differentiated. To begin with, there was the differentiation between the two principal classes, landlords and peasants. Furthermore, the peasantry was differentiated between the rich, middle, and the poor peasant, and the landless labor. It is within this context that we have to understand the role of the national bourgeoisie, political parties, and the peasantry in the national liberation struggle in India.

Beginning with the latter half of the 1910s, until the end of the colonial rule in 1947, there were widespread peasant movements in both British India and in the princely states. In the early stages, the demands of these movements were relatively simple and modest. As the time passed, peasants' demands became more ambitious seeking the end of landlord's economic, political, and judicial powers, in short, the end of rule by the landlord class. These movements were not created by the Indian National Congress nor by Gandhi; rather, they were a product of the internal contradictions between the two principal classes, the landlords and peasants, and they were initiated by peasants themselves. Gandhi, the Congress, and other political parties were, however, directly involved in these movements defining their tactics, strategy, and ideological orientations, organizing and coordinating them from the local and regional to the national level. It should be noted that while the immediate target of these movements was the landlord class, ultimately their target was the colonial rule. It was because the alliance between the colonial state and the princely states (formalized through the Treaties of Friendship and Subordinate Alliance) and the landlords in British India was the foundation of the British colonial rule in India. For the peasant, the landlord was the immediate power he had to deal with in his daily life, while the colonial state was a remote authority. Since the survival of the co-

lonial rule was dependent upon the survival of the landlord class, a successful challenge to the authority of the landlord was at the same time a challenge to the colonial state. Indeed, the main idea behind the alliance between the colonial state and the landlords was that the landlords were the 'natural leaders' (a mythology that was born in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857, a problem I cannot deal with here) of the countryside populated by a politically inert peasantry (the other side of the mythology of the 'natural leaders'). If the landlords lost their traditional hold over the peasantry, that would spell the end of the colonial rule. And that is what happened in India.

The Violence of Non-Violence

Following Fanon, the questions that need be discussed are: which class of the peasantry led the movement? What was the role of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress? Were there other political parties, with different ideological orientation, that were involved? What was the role of the national bourgeoisie? Finally, what was the response / reaction of the landlord class and the colonial state? All these questions emerge out of Fanon's analysis of the peasantry and the national liberation movements in colonial societies passionately elaborated in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Here the most important point to note is the differentiation of peasantry in colonial India and its role in the liberation struggle.

To begin with, peasant movements of the 1910s-1940s that enjoyed the support of the Indian National Congress, with Gandhi at the helms, were initiated and led by the rich and the middle peasants. There were some instances in which the political parties of the left had an influence over a movement in a particular region at a particular moment that involved the poor peasant, landless labor, and the tribal peasantry. The Bijolia movement in the princely state of Mewar (Udaipur) in Rajasthan towards the end of the 1910s under the leadership of Pathik, a precursor to the widespread peasant movements that swept the princely states of Rajsthan in the 1920s-1940s, was one such instance. It was, however, taken over by the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership, with Gandhi's direct involvement, supported by the section of the national bourgeoisie with native roots in Rajasthan, ousting the left leadership, along with the ouster of the tribals, poor peasants, and landless laborers. From that moment onwards, it was the rich and the middle peasant that remained the driving force behind the peasant movements in Rajasthan. There were similar instances in other parts of India at other times. The only exception was Telangana in the princely state of Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), where the peasant movement was led by the communists that was eventually suppressed by the Indian army at the orders of the postcolonial regime. Invariably, the movements led or supported by the Congress under Gandhi's leadership, wedded to the ideology of non-violence, had the rich and the middle peasants as the vanguard, excluding the poor peasant, landless labor, and the tribals. Fanon emphasized the demand of the peasantry for land: "People take their stand on the questions of "bread and land"—how can we obtain the land, and bread to eat?" (*WE 39*). Excluded from the movements against the landlords and the colonial state, the people who needed the land most in order to have the bread to eat, remain excluded from the land until today. That was the violence of non-violence.

Before I conclude this section, I want to briefly address one more issue dealt with by Fanon, i.e., the collaboration between the national bourgeoisie, the national political party, and the colonial state and the landed classes—old and new. In the Indian national liberation struggle, there was a consensus among the above, overriding their internal contradictions, on one ques-

tion. That was their common opposition to socialism. To illustrate my point, I will provide just one instance from the princely states of Rajasthan. In a letter, marked "strictly confidential," to Donald Field, the Chief Minister of the State of Marwar, dated August 1942, by Sir Ganga Singh, the enlightened princely ruler of neighboring state of Bikaner, it was stated:

> The terrors of mob misrule under Soviet Russians have been an eye-opener to the whole world and I am sure you will not like them to be repeated in the Indian states. This is possible only when there exists in the Indian states a healthy public opinion backed up by bonafide and sober minded citizens like Jainarian Vyas (leader of a political party supporting the rich and the middle peasants against the landlords)... [He] is the only man who can wield an elevating influence over thousands of his colleagues and associates who left to themselves will build their thrones upon the ruin of all classes in Rajputana...[S]ince neither you nor your other colleagues think of throwing the state of Marwar to winds, you will surely realize that persons of…eminence will be required too badly to look after the millions at large at a time when you will be no more at the helm of affairs [Jainarain Vyas Papers, Nehru Museum Library, New Delhi: File No 3, Part I].

In 1963, Fanon wrote: "The rural masses, that veritable reservoir of a national revolutionary army…in those countries where colonialism has deliberately held up development, the peasantry, when it rises, quickly stands out as the revolutionary class. For it knows naked oppression" (*WE*: 61). The 'reservoir' of national revolutionary army was undoubtedly there in India. However, Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, the national bourgeoisie in India, the rich and the middle peasants, along with the landed gentry and the colonial state together suppressed it. Should we blame Gandhi for that? My answer is no. Gandhi was not a socialist, and the socialists in India were not unaware of the ideological orientation of Gandhi's and of the Indian National Congress, but they were unable to mobilize the poor peasants, the landless laborers, and the tribals—the reservoir of revolution Fanon talked about—against the powerful alliance of the national and foreign/colonial interests mentioned above. In Vietnam and China, the socialists were successful in mobilizing the reservoir of revolution in the countryside. Was there something historically specific to the Indian situation that distinguished it from the situation in Vietnam and China? Perhaps. But I am not sure what it was. What I'm sure of, though, is that it was not the peasant inertness, or the Indian caste system talked about by the conservative historians like Barrington Moore (1966).

Gandhi did not lead the peasantry to bring about a socialist revolution. However, Gandhi's lack of support, or opposition, to socialist mobilization should not make us negate the accomplishments of anti-colonial struggle in India, with the Indian peasantry as the vanguard, and with Gandhi as one, albeit a most important one, of the leaders of that movement. Bourgeois national liberation movements are not socialist movements, but their value as anti-colonial movements should not be overlooked. Forcing the colonial capitalist to quit (even if it involved compromise and accommodation) was economically, politically, and culturally a move forward. And that was an accomplishment of the Indian people.

Colonialism for Fanon was a perpetual captivity, which compromised the indepen-

dence of the individuals. He wrote: "There is no occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a definitive annihilation. Under this condition, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing" (*AR*: 65). Hence, he viewed the end of colonialism as a precondition to provide a new context, a new possibility to begin the process of restoring the dignity of the colonized (see also Presbey 1996: 283).

That India has not been able to take the next step forward is another question. Did any colonial society where the national liberation struggle was led by a bourgeois, liberal nationalist party move to the next stage? Did Fanon anticipate that?

CONCLUSION

Fanon wrote: "The truth is that there is no colonial power today which is capable of adopting the only form of contest which has a chance of succeeding: the prolonged establishment of large forces of occupation (*WE*: 74). Well, that was then. Things are different now: The history is repeating itself. Colonialism and empires are back: the first time was more than a farce; it was a tragedy: what can we expect of the second time? We have to read Fanon and Gandhi in terms of their relevance to this concrete context of our time.

ABBREVIATIONS

CW: Collected Works
WE: Wretched of the Earth
AR: African Revolution

REFERENCES

Caute, David. 1970. *Frantz Fanon*. New York: The Viking Press

Fanon, Frantz. 1965. *A Dying Colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *The Wretched of the Earth: The handbook for the Black Revolution That is Changing the Shape of the World*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.

Frantz Fanon. 1975, London: Panaf Books, 1975. Series: (Panaf great lives)

Gandhi, M.K. 1958. *The Collected Works, I*. Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust.

Gandhi, M.K. 1963. *The Collected Works, 10*: Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust.

Gibson, Nigel. *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity

Gilly, Adolfo. 1965. "Introduction," *A Dying Colonialism*, pp. 1-21

Moore, Barrington Jr. 1966. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon.

Sartre, Jean-Paul 1968. "Preface," *The Wretched of the Earth, The handbook for the Black Revolution That is Changing the Shape of the World*. By Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove Press, Inc. pp. 7-34.

View publication stats