

## DIALECTICS OF FREEDOM IN FRANTZ FANON AND ITS RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

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### Abstract

*In the contemporary African world where national independence has not brought true decolonisation, as colonialism with its oppressive, exploitative and dehumanising tenets persists via socio-political and economic control, Fanon's anti-colonial philosophy-dialectics of freedom- stands as an existential remedy. And as a matter of fact, the 2011 North Africans' (Tunisia, Morrocco, etc ) violent revolution, 2019 and 2020 Sudanese and Malians' violent revolution that toppled the oppressive governments of Omar Al-Bashir and Ibrahim Keita, respectively, lend credence to the effectiveness of antithesis of dialectics of freedom. Still, in many African states; Cameroon, Egypt, Nigeria, Niger, Burundi, Uganda, etc exploitation and dehumanisation are increasing as consequences of western neo-colonial influences and dictatorship of indigenous African leaders. This paper therefore investigates Fanon's dialectics of freedom, visible in his anti- colonial thought, in the light of the present African predicament, and argues for organised re-implementation of Fanon's antithetical strategy towards liberation of contemporary Africa. The study finds that majority of the oppressed Africans are insentient to their poor condition and unjust systems in the continent hence their show of indifference. The study therefore concludes that effectiveness of antithetical struggle towards authentic African liberation and freedom depends on the self-consciousness of the greater population of the oppressed indigenous Africans.*

**Keywords:** Contemporary; Dialectics; Freedom; Relevance; Self-consciousness

### Introduction

The prejudices of western philosophers like Hume, Kant, Hegel, etc resulted in the relegation of the African, especially the Black, to the level of an irrational being (Oguejiofor, 2001). Hume, for instance, argued that the black man lacks mental capacity, invention, civilisation, ingenuity, and therefore inferior to the white race (Immerwahr, 1992; Immerwahr & Burke, 1993). Also, the denigration of the African by Kant was very remarkable in his discourse on Africans (Oguejiofor, 2001). Also, Hegel excluded Africans from the movement of history, projecting that the continent has no human consciousness, 'movement or development to exhibit' (Hegel, 1956:99). No wonder, Hountondji (1983:11-

12) asserts that 'Hegel provided a powerful philosophical base to the chorus of denigration of the non-white races which accompanied and buoyed up the European colonial white adventure all through the nineteenth and as well as into the twentieth century'. These irrational postulations of western thinkers however became the fertile ground for justification of slavery and consequent colonisation and exploitation of Africa.

Moreover, Fanon's experiences in Martinique and France were very instrumental to his anti-colonial stance and strategy visible in his dialectics of freedom. This dialectics exposes the gap between colonial policies and practices. This gap, for instance, is glaringly clear in the assumed policies of assimilation and association that signifies equality of all peoples, but are in reality a French cultural superiority, domination and hegemony in Africa. The dialectics of freedom therefore became an anti-colonial philosophical thought relevant for curbing racism, social stratification and hindrance of Africans' socio-economic and political equality and mobility in western and African societies (Adele, 1980).

Truly, Fanon's dialectics of freedom was born of his commitment to the Algerian decolonisation struggle, but his thought remain existential in salvaging contemporary African states from the present neocolonial influences, domination and exploitations. Thus, the post colonial Africa is not much different from the colonial past as the masses are still captive, exploited and dehumanised. This is more pronounced as indigenous stooges now exploit the masses to their advantages, those of their cronies and western masters. In this situation, the oppressed African quest for true freedom is still crystallized in Fanon's dialectics of freedom propelled by self consciousness. This consciousness stands as the antithesis of the exploitative and dehumanising order which will ultimately lead to a better human condition.

Indeed, dialectics of freedom exposes the being of the oppressors and oppressed in what Fanon terms the Manichean colonial world (LaRose, 2011). This is a world where there is need to be a violent clash between the oppressors purported to be embodiment of universal good and the oppressed that are being projected as pure evil. The resultant synthesis from this clash, in the light of Fanon, is the new order reflecting true liberation and freedom, end of domination and mental captivity of the oppressed. Therefore, Fanon's dialectics remains a systematic movement of freedom from contradictory societal circumstances to a better form.

### **Explication of Terms**

Plato once asserts that people argue because they do not understand the word being used in the first place (Oguejiofor, 2009). This position reflects the need to analyse these terms: “self-consciousness”, “dialectics” and “freedom”, which are outstanding terms in this discourse. **Self consciousness** is a sense of rational self-awareness or self-awakening. It also connotes self-alertness and one’s capacity to think or entertain conscious thoughts. Self-consciousness indeed points at rational introspection. It is the situation of being rationally in the know of one-self and the events connected to it. Hence it is a rational awareness of one’s being and all the factors affecting it.

Furthermore, **dialectics** means friction, interaction or conflict of different points of view towards establishing the truth. As such, dialectics has to do with the conflict of two opposing positions or contradictory ideas towards a better position or idea. In this sense, dialectics points to the fact that idea develops in an interactive or conflictual manner through action or reaction of thought. In line with Hegel, dialectics is a conflict of thesis and antithesis towards a synthesis that resorts to the same cycle till a better result emerges. So, dialectics is a process of overcoming the contradiction between thesis and antithesis by means of final and near perfect synthesis. Indeed, dialectics is a necessary process that makes up progress in both thought and the world (Blackburn, 2005). In other words, it is a systematic resolution of contradictions in opposing views or ideas in order to arrive at truth. Based on these, dialectics depicts a contradiction of ideas that arrives at the determining and required factor in the interaction.

Finally, **freedom** is a state of being free. This state connotes absence of necessity, coercion, restraint or constraint in choice or action. Blackburn (2005:141) agrees with this meaning and further explains freedom as a ‘condition of liberation from social and cultural forces that are perceived as impeding full self-realization’. Hence, Dukor (2010:15) posits freedom as ‘liberty which means “doing as one wishes” or “doing what one ought” within the dictates and demands of the society, community or the state’.

### **Influences on Fanon’s Dialectics of Freedom**

Fanon’s dialectics of freedom came at the peak of western colonialism in Africa. Colonialism was a Manichean system of profiteers and exploited, predators and predated, rulers and subjected/subjugated, and rich and poor. Describing the colonial situation, Fanon (2001:30) posits that ‘... the two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity’. On the same note,

Micheal Azar (1983) argues that the tension created by these two colonial Manichean zones influenced Fanon's thought in which Aristotelian logic, with its mutually exclusive oppositions stands on one side, and on the other side is the Hegelian logic which stages the lack and contradiction in Aristotelian logic by introducing a subversive negation. Hence, the scourge of colonialism became a critical influence on Fanon's liberation thoughts, especially as colonialism 'made us leave our own history and enter another history' (Cabral, 1972: 52). Colonisation destroys history in order to create its own history. Fanon's dialectics of freedom, which is a theory of decolonisation, is meant to destroy the history of colonisation in order to create a new history, which is the history of humanity.

Influenced by colonial events in which he both experienced and participated, Fanon out of inner debate with amalgam of ideas and thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, Sartre, Aimee, etc set to evolve an intellectual and political position of his own (Gendzier, 1973). His encounter with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* availed him of the idea of self-consciousness, violent struggle and social recognition which underscored his antithetical strategies (LaRose, 2011). As well, Fanon critically appropriated Hegel's allegory of master and slave which enhanced his depiction of the distinctive properties of the colonisers-colonised relation (Sekyi - Otu, 1996). This allegory was however one paradigmatic form among the series of shapes through which self-consciousness leads to actualisation of genuine knowledge and true freedom. As such, 'Fanon follows Hegel in describing the procession of the order of things and configurations of consciousness as a pathway' to freedom (Sekyi - Otu, 1996:26). Influenced by Hegel still, Fanon came to the conclusion that violent revolution is a sure dialectical means of achieving freedom by the oppressed (Martin, 1970:392). But unlike Hegel, Fanon (2008) argues that the paradigmatic development of reciprocity has to be remapped whenever the black is involved. This is because the Hegelian slave fights for his liberation through work but the Negro slave fights for his liberation by struggling to be like the master (Fanon, 2008).

Nevertheless, Fanon's call for self-consciousness of the oppressed to freedom also reflects his assimilation of Marxist dialectical materialism, which anchors on social revolution and societal transformation. Fanon's radicalism however surpasses that of Marx because he goes beyond the Marxist characterization of violence as the midwife of history (LaRose, 2011). He rather projects forceful resistance of colonialism and human oppression towards restoration of equitable order in human societies. Thus, Fanon teaches that through violence directed at the oppressors, the oppressed peoples would reconstitute their human self in an autonomous and unrestricted way (Kebede, 2001). This

violence is inevitable because there is a mutual suspicion as the oppressors guard the dividing line and the oppressed fights to cross the dividing line of oppression.

Meanwhile, Fanon's (2008) dialectics which was also meant to remedy the psycho-existential alienation of the Negro, is heavily derived from Sartre's 'Orphee Noir'; where the thesis is white racism, the antithesis is negritude or white mask, and the synthesis is a new humanism in a world freed from racism. In fact, one of the most outstanding influences of 'Orphee noir' in Fanon (2001), is visible in his projecting of colonial literature as that which must set the required revolution by informing the people and awakening their self and political consciousness. It is in this direction that McCulloch (2002:53) describes Fanon's dynamism as 'what begins as a fierce attack upon "Orphee noir" ends with Fanon's acquiescence to Sartre's dialectics'. So, Fanon's changing attitude towards negritude movement runs parallel with his gradual appropriation of Sartre's dialectics. Therefore, it was until Fanon had accepted the dialectical significance of negritude that he acknowledged the movement as politically and psychologically important. The progressive function of negritude consists of the negation and rejection of the colonial racism and the recognition and acceptance of the black man's historical tradition, which colonialism threatened to consign to eternal oblivion. However, Fanon (2008) criticised Sartre, rejecting his collapse of race into a colourless class. He then reverses Sartre's proposition for a classless society, grounding mutual recognition in the movement or relation between selves, and calls for a recognition that reduces neither the self nor its other to identity.

Indeed, the issue of self-consciousness as envisaged by Fanon in his literary production was also influenced by Aimee Cesaire's psyche of ascent (consisting in self-reflection) contained in his subjective method. With all these physical and intellectual influences, Fanon set to abolish colonialism, neocolonialism, dehumanization, exploitation, and to liberate both the oppressor and oppressed. This aim was reflected in his thought that independence and freedom 'must not be the result of one barbarism replacing another barbarism, of one crushing man replacing another crushing man' (Fanon, 1965: 32). Consequently, Fanon's philosophy became anchored on application of dialectics in explaining the movement of history and African society towards true freedom. In this process, Fanon was convinced that African society could pass from its subjugated state to a better order with application of necessary antithetical strategies. This dialectics of freedom is possible because Fanon's antithesis is a *nisus* or tendency which when effectively applied leads to an intended socio-political and economic order in Africa.

### **Dialectics of Freedom in Frantz Fanon**

Dialectics of freedom in Fanon revolves on the contradictions and resolutions arising from the coloniser-colonised and oppressor-oppressed relations. This dialectics of freedom is therefore 'dialectics of experience' (Ato 1996:26), and 'a movement of the colonised from colonisation to decolonisation' (Isife, 2020: 269). Thus, dialectics of freedom is a contradictory relationship between the thesis of colonialism and the antithesis of revolutionary violence that will lead to the synthesis of freedom. Colonialism contextually represents every oppressive system. As such, the oppression, exploitation and dehumanisation of contemporary Africans resulting from western influences is colonialism. This means that Fanon's dialectics of freedom is existential and applicable in present African predicament, or contemporary Africa. It is anticipated that the oppressive/exploitative systems being perpetuated by the political elite and the antithesis struggle/movements of the oppressed masses will eventually lead to the synthesis of a new societal order. In line with Fanon, this movement has to be a revolution; an inevitable confrontation with predatory *status quo* to restore the proper order. The revolutionary violence is for Fanon one of the means through which the colonised/oppressed achieve their freedom (Carastathis, 2010; Onwuanibe, 1983). This is so because, according to Fanon, the oppressors are violent, and they use the language of violence and force and surround themselves with violence systems, institutions and apparatus.

In the dialectics of freedom therefore, the oppressors are the principal catalysts of the oppressed violent movements based on the oppressors' willful denigration of the life and humanness of the oppressed. Ogbu (1975) reacts to this oppressors' violent perspective as requiring the opposite reaction (antithesis) of breaking out in violent revolution in order to smash all suffocating oppressive and dehumanizing systems. No wonder, dialectics of freedom is a 'therapeutic act by which oppressed man severs the umbilical cord that binds him to exploiters and thereby heals his psyche by a renovative act which purges him of his inferiority and helplessness' (Ogbu 1975:55).

### **Self-Consciousness in Fanon's Dialectics of Freedom**

Oppressive conditions cannot change without the self-consciousness of the oppressed. The struggle for freedom as evident in Fanon's dialectics of freedom begins with self-consciousness of the oppressed, and progresses to breaking the chains of mental and physical captivity. This means there is an absolute necessity for a liberated consciousness in order to achieve a liberated society (LaRose 2011). This is as self-consciousness facilitates mental decolonisation of inferiority complexes and internalised ideas planted by the oppressors to hold

the oppressed captive. Self-consciousness therefore ushers in self-realisation and self-recognition of intrinsic values and worth. This awareness propels the oppressed towards reconstructing the oppressed self and society into true reflection of egalitarianism and human dignity. Self-consciousness is therefore the catalyst of the antithesis of dialectics of freedom. It is like the logical middle term which gives existence to the conclusion that is, intended synthesis.

### **The Antithetical Violence in Fanon's Dialectics of Freedom**

Violence is a product of self-consciousness and a fervent antithetical strategy in Fanon's dialectics of freedom. Yet, the oppressors are the principal architects of oppressed self-consciousness through their violence, exploitation and dehumanising policies. This is why Fanon insists that any system that does not totally recognise the people but opposes them represents the ultimate revolutionary challenge between the oppressed and the oppressors and calls for violent confrontation (LaRose 2011). Fanon however considers this antithetical violence a risk but insists that 'it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus it is tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence...' (LaRose 2011:17).

For Fanon therefore, violence embodies the risk of death. But the risk of death concretises the essence of human existence: the need for human recognition and the quest for freedom. Violence and risk of death in this context mean that the life of the oppressed is transformed into the corporeal manifestation of the 'universal objective truth' of freedom (LaRose 2011:18). Violence therefore becomes an important antithesis because oppressive system does not recognise the masses as human beings worthy of exercising their right to sovereignty. Thus, the nature of dialectics forces the oppressed to demand recognition from their oppressors and court death to obtain it. With violence which connotes readiness to die, the oppressed clearly indicate the values of what they are dying for; the values of freedom and of being recognised and treated as humans. In all these, the 'rehabilitative value of violence lies in the equation that the colonised are ready to risk the only and most precious thing they have, namely; their life, for their dignity and equality' (Kebede 2001:549)

In clear terms, the thesis of Fanon's dialectics of freedom is the oppressive, exploitative and dehumanizing governance in African states. Such governance is irrationally against humanity; it is enough violence and is sustained by violence. Hence the choice of greater violence as fervent antithesis that can contradict the existing violence and then restore order. Fanon explains this thus; 'the violence of the colonial regime and the counter violence of the native balance each other, and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal

homogeneity' (Fanon, 2001:69). Of course, the synthesis is certain for 'at the level of individuals, violence has a cleansing force' (Fanon, 2001:74). It frees the oppressed from their inferiority complex, despair and inaction, and restores their boldness and self-confidence. Such resistance to oppression again takes freedom out of the realm of abstraction and inequitable world into the concrete equitable world of human relations. At the end, it again unifies the people; unraveling to them the fact that liberation struggle is the business of all the oppressed and that none has any special merit than others.

Though violent demand for recognition stands as the apex of human struggle for liberation, Fanon did not glorify violence for violence sake. Rather, he was convinced that it stands as a workable antithetical strategy to freedom. This is based on the rationale that true freedom or eradication of oppression and exploitation can never take the form of national independence conferred by the oppressors, but must come through violent actions from the masses. Birt (1997:211) lend credence to this fact when he states;

there can be no radical transformation of identity without an entire struggle to radically transform the social order. And no radical transformation of the social structure is possible (nor would it have a purpose) without the transformation of identity – the self creation of a new kind of human being. It is this self-creation and renewal that is the aim of all effort.

However, violence is not envisaged to be persisting after the dialectics of freedom, for the thesis (poor situation) which propelled it must have vanished through its encounter with greater violence (antithesis). More so, the newly liberated masses would not prefer to devalue the eventual existential self-actualisation and human dignity born of violent confrontation and risking death. Thus, the once oppressed would now reconstitute their human self in an autonomous and unrestricted way (Kebede 2007). This hard won freedom leads to a radical transformation of society, specifically because the formerly oppressed have become instruments of true societal change by regaining dominion and control over their own selves, land, culture, resources and collective identity.

### **The Neocolonial condition of Contemporary African States**

Independence of African states were mere transformation of colonialism to neocolonialism. The attainment of political independence therefore only changed the composition of managers of most African states, not the character of the colonial era. Hence, the attainment of Independence by African states did not destroy but preserved the colonial structures and systems. This makes



Fanon's dialectics of freedom relevant in post-colonial Africa. (Isife, 2020). This is as much of the social, political and economic structures that today operate in almost all African states originate from the colonial past (Oguejiofor, 2001). In fact, there was rarely any incorporation of indigenous African socio-political and economic institutions in the independent African states. As such, most African states are shaped by colonial tenets into arbitrary governance, exercise of absolute power and collision with citizens. So, most African states emerged as an apparatus of violence; lacking deep connection with the indigenous society and social forces, and thus reclining to coercion rather than consent (Ake, 2000).

The reality therefore remains that African nationalists and present leaders just accepted the colonial alienation they had set themselves to oppose and reject (Davidson, 1993). This development can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the erstwhile colonists engineered the situation to maintain their claws on African states. This is in order to maximise the foreign income from their multinational corporations, to enhance cheap acquisition of raw materials for their industries and to have African market under their control for their surplus products. Second, African leaders and stakeholders are largely products of colonial and western education. As such, they are still prisoners of the mode of thought which they have learned in European or American Universities. Too, they are still caught up in the paradigms established by European scholars for the study and administration of Africa (Eleazu, 1975).

Thus, from Algeria in the north, Namibia in the south, Kenya in the east to Nigeria and Cameroon in the west, post colonial African states are not free. The West and China, through their multinational corporations, diplomatic missions and loans have continued to control African economies and politics in cohort with African dictators that run African affairs on behalf of these capitalists (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011). In continuation, Italian Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, in *Al Jazeera News* of 10th February 2019, once blamed France for the incessant African migration through the Mediterranean Sea to their shores, stating that France dire grip on African states had led to such hardship that they were forced to leave their Africa for presumed greener pasture in Europe, America and other countries. It has been noted that till date France still 'controls the leadership, printing and currency operations of Senegal; and up to 13 other African countries to her advantage' (Chinweuba, 2019:13). Britain similarly controls the socio-political and economic affairs of Nigeria and other Anglophone African states. China with its Trojan loan lays control in Congo, Zambia, and many other African states. Worst still, the poor and dictatorial governance in African states and her leaders' dependence on western

governments and China to capture and remain in power result in spite of denigration, exploitation, impoverishment and dehumanisation of the larger population of Africa. In some African states, it has even become part of national orientation to promote the absoluteness of these oppressors and to manipulate the already dehumanized masses towards remaining inferior and in denial of their humanness (Sekyi – Otu, 1996).

And with colonial languages standing as lingua franca in many African states, coupled with western styled education curriculum, the psyche and destiny of the indigenous Africans are still controlled. In the same vein, the mastery of French, English, German, Chinese and other foreign languages is viewed as coming closer to being a real human being (Fanon, 2008). With these, there is a constant and visible effort by many Africans to run away from their individuality and identity or to annihilate their own presence (Fanon, 2008). And in reality, many in this desperate journey have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea or perished in the Sahara desert as they try to migrate to Europe (Chinweuba, 2019). The further result is the spate of *evolue*: a schizophrenic and crisis riddled personhood whose autochthonous constituent nature has been bastardised (Odimegwu, 2008). These are coupled with predatory governance which as envisaged by Fanon created in African states a Manichean society with dual zones of profiteers and exploited, rulers and subjugated, rich and poor (Fanon, 2001).

### **Relevance of Fanon’s Dialectics of Freedom in Contemporary Africa**

Fanon’s anti-colonial philosophy consisting in dialectics of freedom is not channeled against the European imperialists. This is because it is not a racist philosophy, but rather a remedy to the inhuman condition of indigenous Africans who suffer directly from the crude economic and political exploitation as well as social injustice of the colonial and neo-colonial Africa. Since, the dialectics of freedom contributed to the independence of African states, it stands to salvage Africans from the present neocolonial predicament. This is more so as colonial tenets; systems, institutions and patterns of operation when Fanon’s thoughts came into being are direly functional in contemporary African states. In fact, the larger reality at independence of African states was visible change of expatriates with indigenous politicians. This is why Akinola (1994:27) describes African states as ‘ready-made states disposing enormous power but with few virile institutions that could check the abuse of these powers’. And referring to Nigeria as an instance, Olusoji (2012:195) observes;

there was no way in which the neo-colonial social formation inherited by Nigeria with its conditions of dislodgement, confusion, dependence, foreign domination, alienation of the people from the state, an

unproductive and dependent dominant class and structural disabilities could have been stable or united following political independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960.

The relevance of dialectics of freedom therefore lies in the fact that the consistency of the antithesis as proposed by Fanon will engender lasting freedom and a new humanism in African states; a new theory of humanity rooted in human nature (Fanon, 1967). This will be a conscious humanity that would be active in self dialectics (self-consciousness) and self-other dialectics (communal relation and reciprocity) that promote healthy relationship, unity and development among the oppressed within the indigenous African states. Apart from these, the antithetical violence when applied by the oppressed would mobilise and bind them together as one people. It thus would inculcate in each of their consciousness the idea of unity, a common cause, a national destiny and a collective history (Fanon, 1963). This is because each of them will have a link in the great chain that would topple the oppressors' violence and captivity. Based on this, Gordon observes that 'at the centre of Fanon's dialectics of freedom is the possibility of symmetry; the self that sees another as other is also seen by the other as its other' (Gordon 2010:10). Indeed, the antithetical violence when applied will remain a preventive mechanism from tendencies of future oppressors and exploiters.

Besides, the synthesis of Fanon's dialectics (liberation and freedom) stands to boost the confidence of the indigenous people to live, work and put a strong and consequential voice in the socio-political and economic affairs of their various states. This synthesis will along this line secure the self respect, dignity, identity, personhood and humanness of indigenous Africans. On the other hand, the antithetical violence that leads to freedom would act as a cleansing force (Fanon, 1963). This is as it would free the oppressed from inferiority complex, colonial ideas, despair and inaction, and fill them with fearlessness, self respect and human dignity.

## **Conclusion**

Fanon's dialectics of freedom signals a dialectical movement from freedom to bondage, liberation and freedom (Gordon, 2010; Wright, 1992). But freedom at last exposes a new creation visible in the liberated people comprising of the earlier oppressors and their victims. Since his thought is meant to stir self-consciousness and move for a counter thesis in the oppressed, Fanon's anti-colonial philosophy is relevant towards solving the present neocolonial

predicament of contemporary African states. This is as all the systems and institutions of colonial Africa are direly more functioning in contemporary Africa. Although, Fanon chose violence as essential in antithetical march towards freedom, the oppressed Africans must know that true freedom and free society does not emerge on a platter of gold and never conferred by the oppressors but through consistent counter actions from the oppressed masses.

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